

Elmer and Senator Chambers.

SENATOR R. JOHNSON: Mr. President and members, I rise, one, to support the advancement of the bill and, number two, to respond to a point that was made actually yesterday, but I waited to this point to make some comments. There were some points made yesterday by Senator Schmit that there are those of us supporting LB 1059 in order to cover our back sides because of LB 361 passing and the large number of ag land valuations going up. That is not the purpose that I am supporting this bill and I am not concerned that passage of 1059 will suddenly jeopardize the ag land valuation amendment that is on the ballot for November. That is, I think, a separate issue, but they are somewhat interrelated, but the fact of the matter is that the time has finally come for us in this state to respond to a question of tax equity. And, yeah, I'm hearing a lot from my farmers out there who are complaining that their ag land valuations have gone up substantially, but if we, as Senator Withem has just indicated, if we don't do anything, what is the alternative? There is no safety net following this bill. If we fall, we fall a long ways, 16.49 percent, as he has indicated. That's on top of the increases in the ag land valuation area. I didn't vote for 361 because I wanted to. I felt it was the only responsible action that this Legislature had last year. That was brought about, not by this Legislature, but by the courts telling us. We could be in the same situation in school finance if we don't respond to this issue and I think 1059 is a responsible action to respond to a crisis that has occurred. We know Mr. Jaksha's petition is going on out there. We know that the court system has a lawsuit filed that could very well throw out our current education finance plan and so I guess I don't see much choice. I guess I feel like we're almost in the same situation that we were with LB 361. We either make a commitment to do this, or we suffer the consequences, and I guess I'm ready to take the consequences of 1059. I'm in a lucky position, unlike some of you. Every school district in my legislative district benefits under the package so it's an easy vote for me. I realize there are many of you, however, that don't have that luxury and I commend you and I admire you for the decisions you're going to have to make because it's the same decision that many of us in the rural areas had to make last year with 361. It's my hope that the amendment that's on the ballot, LR 2, will pass and we can come back in next year and start arguing about how we're going to value ag land separate and distinct from this school finance package, but I really don't see this as a